

THE STATUS OF THE FLORIDA CROW

(Corvus brachyrhynchos pascuus)

BY HAROLD H. BAILEY

On coming to Florida to live I have formed new opinions on many of its birds, one of which is the Florida Crow. Off hand, when watching them, I could see nothing different from the crows I was familiar with in the north, nor do these south Florida crows have any different call to me than the northern ones. Why the subspecies "pascuus?" I thought, and commenced to get some specimens to see wherein the difference lay. I now have before me five specimens of the so-called "pascuus,"—all taken in south Florida, County of Dade. I also have seven specimens of plain unadulterated Common Crow, four from Pennsylvania, one from Virginia (altitude 4500') and two from central Georgia (altitude about 1200'). Now I believe these seven common crows from those three states represent that good old unadulterated crow fairly well. So now let us get down to "brass tacks."

Ridgway, B. of N. & M. Am. Bull.—50. Part III—page 269, says of "pascuus"—, "similar to C—a—americans, but averaging smaller—, except bill and feet."

Bendire, Life Histories; page 413—, says, "distinguishable from its northern relative by its decidedly larger feet and bill, and its usually shorter wings and tail."

There are several others that I might refer to, about similar to above, but the best and most complete description is given by Baird, Brewer and Ridgway, Land Birds—Vol. II, page 247. "This resident crow of Florida differs in some marked features from that of the more northern localities in several characters. Although perhaps rather smaller, the bill and feet, especially the latter, are very considerably larger. The nasal feathers extend over the basal two-fifths of the bill, instead of half. The proportions of the bill are about the same; in the Florida bird it is rather longer. The greatest difference is in the feet. The tarsal joint of the tibia is bare; the feathers scarcely coming below it, even anteriorly, instead of projecting some distance. The tarsus is almost a quarter of an inch longer; covered anteriorly by nine scutellæ, instead of eight. The outer lateral toe is shorter, not reaching the base of the middle claw. The middle toe and claw

are considerably shorter than the tarsus; the middle claw is shorter than in the northern bird. The wing formula differs somewhat, the third, fourth and fifth quills are nearly equal, the third even longer than the fifth, instead of shorter. The tail is short and very nearly even, the difference in length being less than half an inch instead of an inch." In conclusion they state, "It is possible the bird is really as large as the northern crow, although this is hardly probable. It was killed on the mainland of the extreme southern portion of Florida, not far from Fort Dalla." (Miami-Dade County). To begin with, four of the Florida Crows are larger than five of my Common Crows, and one larger than my largest (Va.) Common Crow. There is no set rule regarding the extent of nasal feathers, and in both forms they extend further in males than females. As a whole, both forms average up about the same. The tarsal joint is exposed as much in the northern birds as with Florida birds. An average of length of all the bills is about the same; as well as in thickness. Some of the Florida birds have nine scutellæ all right and some eight, but so have some of the northern crows, and some only seven; so one sees there is no set and fast rule there. In all Florida specimens the outer lateral toe does reach the base of the middle claw. The middle toe measurements average equally well between both forms; the Virginia specimen ranking with the largest Florida specimen. Nor do I find the extra $\frac{1}{4}$ " attributed to the tarsus of the Florida bird, both forms averaging the same. Length of wing; average the same. There is as much variation in the length of the bird, fourth and fifth quills in one form as with the other. The difference in length of tail feathers is greater in the Florida form than in the northern ones and not even, as described. I must admit the tarsus of the Florida bird is larger in diameter than the northern one, but all were taken within two years, while the northern material covers a period of ten years and is well dried and shrunken. The food of the Florida Crow consists mainly of frogs, lizards, and large grasshoppers and beetles, with a few seeds and wild fruit. Perhaps the nature of their food has increased the size of their tarsus.

In summing up, I for one do not think the Florida Crow is worthy of a place in the new check list, and beg leave to suggest to the Committee of A. O. U. that they eliminate same. Let us hear the views of others having material.